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Reflection- FAE Chapter 5

My early childhood is characterized by positive memories of elementary school. I was a well behaved, model student, earning straight A’s and top scores on standardized tests. Although I was a bit timid and soft spoken, my confidence was positively impacted by the praise and accomplishment I received for my academic capability. While learning the basics of contemporary education such as rules, reading, writing, math, “Teacher Centered” classrooms offered comfort, stability, predictability.

Upon entering middle school, I was excited and apprehensive to experience an elevated level of independence and opportunity. Though the “Teacher Centered” classrooms remained constant, my perception of comfort, stability and predictability was eradicated. I felt stifled by the regimented, directive environment, and grew discouraged and uninterested from the lack of diversity, flexibility and engagement. Formerly an eager learner, my grades suffered and I began skipping school regularly. Years later, high school proved to be an unfortunate extension of middle school, yet age and experience allowed me to adapt and navigate an environment I was inherently incompatible with. It wasn’t until college that I realized the magnitude of my educational deficiencies; I was overwhelmed and unprepared, lacking self-sufficiency and basic study skills.

Yet along the way, there were several teachers who stood out among the masses; these were the teachers who made coming to school worthwhile. Some of these teachers were among the school’s the most highly regarded, while others were denigrated. Collectively, they helped students find meaning in their academics; leading by example, they encouraged critical thinking, exploration, individual participation and group discussion. Students were allowed autonomy and were empowered to self govern in a supportive, tolerant environment. After reflecting on the material presented in FAE, it is apparent that these aforementioned teachers differed from their peers in that they embraced “Student Centered” learning. Careful consideration of my educational experience has enabled me to understand that “Student Centered” learning will shape the core of my educational philosophy as a future educator.

The two educational philosophies that I predominately favor are Progressivism and Constructivism. As an older student, I found myself struggling when tasked with note taking, studying, and critical thinking. I attribute this to the “Teacher Centered” environment of my early formative years. I value the Constructivist view that “students who have a sound understanding of important principles that were developed through their own critical thinking will be better prepared for the complex, technological world.” While I was told what to memorize for a test, I was not shown how to extract important ideas, learn and commit to long term memory. As characterized by Progressivism, I believe it is more important to teach children how to think, than what to think. This approach allows for individuality, adaptability and progression, which are essential attributes for attaining success academically, professionally and socially. I appreciate that Progressivism places value on traditional subjects and scientific method-orientated learning, while allowing for tactics such as repetition and memorization; these practices may prove beneficial to specific students and grade levels. Also, the Progressive emphasis on democracy affords students the opportunity to carry out and apply real life principles in the classroom.

Overall, I’ve found value in each of the educational philosophies presented in FAE, and I believe that it would be foolish to prescribe to some while neglecting the others. While I may favor a specific few philosophies, they may not fully and adequately fulfill the needs of all of my students. For me, the best tactic will be to remain well-informed, flexible, open-minded and observant, ensuring that my educational philosophy is concurrent with the needs of each student.